

Press Release
First Meeting of the Joint Working Group on Palm Oil
between the European Union and Relevant ASEAN Member Countries
27 January 2021

The Joint Working Group on Palm Oil between the European Union and relevant ASEAN member countries met for the first time, online, on 27 January 2021.

The Joint Working Group was organised as part of a commitment reached at the 23rd ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting held on 1 December 2020, which elevated EU-ASEAN relations to a Strategic Partnership. The meeting was opened by Indonesia's Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Mahendra Siregar, and the European External Action Service Secretary-General, Mr. Stefano Sannino. The meeting brought together representatives from Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, the European Commission and the European External Action Service.

Participants engaged in open, frank and productive initial discussions on sustainable vegetable oils. In order to meet sustainability goals, including those related to the UN Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals, participants in the working group acknowledged the importance of addressing sustainability at the level of vegetable oils in general, and palm oil in particular, to address the challenges in this important sector, notably through:

1. Establishing a dialogue on the challenges faced in sustainable vegetable oil production;
2. Ensuring that the environmental challenges within the palm oil sector are mutually understood with a view to addressing them in a holistic, transparent and non-discriminatory manner;
3. Sharing relevant information on sustainable vegetable oil production and contribute towards a better mutual understanding of the sustainability criteria and the process of certification for vegetable oils, and the overarching framework provided by the Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals;
4. Discussing and considering possible technical cooperation to underpin this process, which may include: collaboration to promote sustainability efforts and practices in the palm oil industry, especially for smallholders; and studies or research on sustainability criteria and certification of vegetable oils.

Participants agreed to continue the Joint Working Group with the next meeting in April 2021, which can be preceded by expert meetings to deepen mutual understanding on the issues at hand and discuss possible two-way cooperation.
